Information is all around us. Whether you are in kindergarten or an adult, you face an information problem on a daily basis. “In today’s complex society, it is not enough to be able learn to read, write, and do math.” (Robinson, 2008) In our fast paced, technology driven society, students must learn the skills to recognize an information problem, locate resources to solve the problem, and then evaluate the information in order to make an informed decision. If we start teaching students how to research effectively when they are young, then as students get older they will become more proficient in their strategies.

The Super3 and Big6 are research methods that schools around the country use to help guide students in the task of researching. Often, school and teachers wait too long to begin this learning. “Unfortunately, most schools don’t even consider teaching research skills until high school.” (Landreau, 2011) Because researching is a complex task, many educators believe that students need to be older to begin learning the process. On the contrary, the younger you begin, the more successful students can be. “Young children should have authentic opportunities to plan and make choices.” (Robinson, 2008) In a school setting, teachers and librarians can interact with students and help them learn the process of acquiring information and using that information to make decisions. This type of teaching lends itself to very active learning. Gone are the days where students “sit and get.”

When students are engaged in the Super3 or Big6, they become self-directed, independent learners who are driven to meet their goals. The Super3 and Big6 are simply research frameworks in which students use to navigate while researching. “The Big Six process gives structure to research.” (Jansen, 1996) Unlike a rigid process, the Super3 and Big6 can be used in sequential order or they can be manipulated back and forth until the goal is reached. “It is not necessary to complete these stages in a linear order, and a given stage doesn’t have to take a lot of time.” (Parson, et. al, 2003) This allows students the freedom to critically think and drive their own learning. “Eisenberg and Berkowitz are quite clear that although the process is described in a linear progression, it tends to loop back on itself when you are working through a research task. (Hughes, 2003) Too often, students complete school tasks by going through the motions. Using this research method, students control their learning based on what information they access and how they apply that information. “The Big6 can be applied as a thinking process to deal with most problems and therefore can be applied consistently and repeatedly throughout the learning program, thereby increasing the student’s chances of learning it.” (Hughes, 2003)

We as educators know that what students learn and what they are exposed to at a young age has a profound impact on them as older learners. It is vital that we help students learn to compete in our world by helping them foster critical thinking skills that support them through the research journey. The Big6 has six steps: Task Definition, Information Seeking Strategies, Location and Access, Use of Information, Synthesis, and Evaluation. The Super3 is designed for younger learners (K –2). The steps in the Super3 are: Plan: Beginning, Do: Middle, and Review: End. The best thing about this method is that it is not taught in isolation. It has the ability to be used across all grade levels and all subject areas. Therefore, students will grasp the model because it lends itself so well to all domains. Many times, students are confused when they learn a process for just one subject/class. The beauty of the Big6 is that the application is so wide reaching. Not only do kids use this method, but adults do too. Sometimes we don’t put a formal label on it, but we still follow the steps to reach our end goal. “The processes are applicable whenever people need and use information on an academic or personal level.” (Robinson, 2008)

One area of the Big6 that is often left out of the traditional research style is the concept of reflection. Often students finish their product and that is the end of everything. In the Big6, students are encouraged to take time to reflect on their work. “This reflection stage needs to be more than a memory or recitation of completed activities.” (Robinson, 2008) Students have to be taught to consider what was easy in the process and what was difficult. They can contemplate what else they need to learn and how to go about it. They should take note of how they felt about their learning. Was it exciting and engaging? This idea of reflection mirrors the “evaluation” stage Bloom’s Taxonomy. By including the judgment piece in the Big6, we as educators are assured that we are utilizing higher-order thinking skills. “If you look at the direct connection to Bloom’s Taxonomy, the six steps follow that well known description of thinking skills from lower order to higher order thinking skills.” (Hughes, 2003)

From these articles, it is clear to me that librarians and teachers need to collaborate. Working together, they can help students begin to recognize information problems. In doing so, they will join forces to teach the necessary steps to children. In acting like a team, the librarian and teacher can help support each other. They will be able to design rich lessons that incorporate critical thinking skills. This should not be a once a year event. Ideally, you would want to use this process repeatedly throughout the year to help students become more proficient at each stage. From a student perspective, this model should help them feel confident to tackle any information problem they encounter. They will develop the skills to use on their own as well as at school. The transfer should be seamless. These research skills will benefit students throughout their life.

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